

# McDSP DE555, NF575 & Futzbox

New releases from the McDSP camp have expanded its portfolio of processing with some novel plug-ins. With a de-esser, a noise filter and Futz, **GEORGE SHILLING** says that good things come in threes.



Joining the variety of brands recently launching new de-essing plug-ins, McDSP throw its hat into the ring with the DE555 (the name sort of looks like DE-ESSS *[but more like DESSS. Ed]* and takes a leaf out of the Propellerheads' Reason book of device naming). It follows the green house-colour scheme, and like other McDSP plug-ins is enhanced with a few graphs to show the workings. Thankfully there are rather fewer controls than the Sonnox rival.

The plug-in takes a no-nonsense traditional approach to the de-esser, with a sidechain filter feeding a compressor, and controls are logically laid out separately for both sections. Filter frequency is selectable from 500Hz to 15kHz, and is switchable between band pass and high pass, with a handy Listen button to switch it into the main path for auditioning purposes. The knob labelled Focus usefully adds gain at the turnover frequency in High Pass mode, and narrows the bandwidth in Band Pass mode, allowing emphasis of the chosen frequency (and therefore more gain reduction around that area).

Focus is scaled from zero to 100, with maximum boost in High Pass apparently around 10dB. All these adjustments are clearly reflected in the Frequency Response/Key graph below the controls. The section labelled De-Esser is the compression part of the signal path. Range equates to the Threshold, with the settings of zero to 36 roughly reflecting the dB setting below zero. Ratio ranges from 2 to 20, and these two settings are reflected on the Dynamics graph. Release runs from 1.0 to 100ms, but with 10.0 roughly half way round, and there is an HF Only setting, plus an Output Level knob with +/-24dB. At the far right, tall narrow level meters simultaneously display input, output and gain reduction.

It's difficult to make de-essing seem glamorous and McDSP sensibly hasn't really tried to. Instead, this is a straightforward but efficient and great sounding plug-in. The only minor problem I found was that if you boosted the corner frequency enough, it was sometimes impossible to set the Range (or threshold) high enough for very subtle or minimal de-essing — effectively it sets the threshold up to about -10dBFS, which means that without trimming down the input to the plug-in you might be de-essing more than you want. Apart from this the DE555 (US\$495) works very well indeed, with a beautifully simple setup and excellent graphical indication. It was particularly useful for a female jazz vocal where it tamed the shrill



similants without seeming to dull the gorgeous valve-miked breathiness. I also had plenty of success with male rock vocals and mastering settings work well, with transparent processing in all instances.

At first glance the NF575 in might appear to be a standard type of EQ, with rows of knobs for different bands, and a frequency graph, but it behaves rather differently, with some unusual filtering features. The NF575 (US\$495) provides high and low pass filters, both covering 20Hz to 20kHz and with slopes of 6 to 36dB per octave. So far, so normal, but in between these are five tuneable notch filters that overlap and each covers seven octaves, spanning frequencies from 40Hz to 20kHz. Dubbed the 'Noise Filter', this is perhaps something of a misnomer, as the features and capabilities are suited to all kinds of uses other than simply filtering 'noise'. This is a rather different tool to noise reduction software such as Waves X-Noise and Bias SoundSoap Pro.

The notch filters' frequencies are linkable, with frequency relationships maintained while sweeping, and boast variable Q, a range of 40dB and individual bypass. There are also individual band Solo buttons. These drop the overall level and flip the notch to a band-pass, essentially boosting the target band so you can sweep around and find the offending frequency. Towards the end of the review period this plug-in came into its own when a jazz vocal recording (with live improvisatory pianist) suffered a whistling valve mic on the only master take of a song. Using the NF575 I quickly found the offending frequency, guessing that it was about 8kHz and sweeping a soloed band I found it to be centred around 7.25kHz. Un-soloing, the default setting reduced the whistle perfectly with little apparent degradation of the signal, and the day was saved! Other typical uses might include filtering out mains hum or any annoying resonances. By using automation you can also create terrific phasing effects. As usual with McDSP there is an excellent collection of presets.

The concept of the FutzBox (US\$495) plug-in is not dissimilar to that of Audio Ease's Speakerphone, and much 'futz' fun is to be had, creating distorted, low-fidelity versions of audio signals. It is not quite



as sophisticated and complex a processor as its Dutch rival, but it is easy to set up, includes plenty of possibilities, and makes efficient use of computer resources. Advantageously there is a TDM version, and the latency is an astonishing 3 samples.

There are seven different processor sections that can each be separately enabled. Synthetic Impulse Modelling (SIM) provides categorised radios, headphones, phones, toys, containers and suchlike, each accompanied by a photo. There are hundreds of these, and the related Tune parameter behaves differently depending on the modelled item. Often, it seems to usefully change the frequency of any resonance, making the item seem larger or smaller. The Lo-Fi section reduces sample and bit rate and includes a filter to reduce aliasing. The Filters section provides more comprehensive High and Low Pass filters. There is a Distortion section with 10 types and three knobs for control. Following this there is an additional parametric EQ band with further filtering possibilities. A Noise Generator includes yet more filters for shaping, and a Noise Duck section for convincing radio conversations and the like. Finally, a comprehensive Gate section can keep a lid on extraneous signal or create static or signal dropouts for effect, with extended parameter ranges.

A very useful Mix control knob seamlessly blends processed and unprocessed sound to moderate the effect. In and Out levels enable the effect to be driven to different degrees and the level compensated for. The categorised and sub-categorised presets cover a huge number of starting points, and it is also interesting to just scroll through the SIM settings — 'futz' is fun!

All three plug-ins are available for all types of Pro Tools plug-in and all channel configurations; they are sonically unimpeachable, practically and elegantly designed, and would make a terrific addition to your essential plug-in collection in all branches of music and postproduction. ■

**PROS** Exceptionally low latency; transparent de-essing; efficient filtering; unique Futz'ing!

**CONS** Pro Tools only.

#### Contact

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